

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<b>Project Name:</b>	Lonetree Wind Farm Environmental Studies
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	June 2012
<b>Proponent:</b>	Lonetree Wind Farm, LLC
<b>Location:</b>	Section 36, Township 1 North, Range 19 East (Common Schools) Section 36, Township 1 North, Range 20 East (Common Schools)
<b>County:</b>	Stillwater

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proponent, Lonetree Wind Farm, LLC, has requested the DNRC Southern Land Office issue a Land Use License in order to conduct environmental studies related to potential future wind generation projects on Sections 36-1N-19E and 36-1N-20E both in Stillwater County. The proponent would like to drive on existing roads on the sections in order to locate and identify any threatened or endangered species, species of concern and other wildlife that may be present on the Trust land or adjoining private lands. The data gathered will be used to help determine the feasibility of a future wind farm on private and/or Trust land. In the future, if a wind energy development is proposed on the Trust land a separate environmental review would be conducted at that time.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

No formal public scoping was performed by DNRC for this proposed project. Lessee settlements were obtained with the grazing lessee on each section.

#### 2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None

#### 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

**Proposed Alternative:** Approve the request to issue a Land Use License for environmental monitoring on Sections 36-T1N-R19E and 36-T1N-R20E with the mitigations listed at the end of this document.

**No Action Alternative:** Deny the request to issue a Land Use License for environmental monitoring on the requested sections.

### III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

#### **4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:**

*Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.*

All permitted motorized travel will be limited to established roads during dry or frozen conditions. Foot travel to the remainder of the property would be permitted. Minimal soil disturbance would occur as a result these activities, no significant impacts are expected.

#### **5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:**

*Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.*

Section 36-1N-19E contains a stockwater well and reservoir in the SE¼ as well as Keyser Creek that runs through the NE¼ of the section. In Section 36-1N-20E there is a stockwater spring development in the SE¼SW¼ and the North Fork of Valley Creek runs through the S½S½ of the section. One of the mitigation strategies proposed would limit motorized travel to existing roads and only during dry or frozen conditions to protect the soil as well as limit erosion. No significant impacts are anticipated from the proposed action.

#### **6. AIR QUALITY:**

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.*

The proposal would entail limited vehicular travel on the Trust land sections. No significant adverse impacts to air quality are anticipated from the proposed action.

#### **7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:**

*What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.*

Minimal soil disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed activities. The mitigations will limit motorized travel to existing roads and only during dry or frozen conditions. No significant impacts are expected from implementing the proposed action.

#### **8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

*Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.*

A variety of big game such as mule deer and antelope, small mammals, raptors and songbirds use these parcels. The type of work proposed along with the limitations on motorized travel should limit impacts to species using or traversing the Trust land. No significant impacts are expected from implementing the proposed action.

#### **9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:**

*Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

A proposed project area search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program database identified two vertebrate animals that are listed as sensitive species: Greater Sage-Grouse and Greater Short-horned Lizard. Neither is known to occupy either of the subject sections. Additionally, neither section is located within the sage grouse core areas identified by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP). The purpose of this LUL is to allow monitoring to identify if either of these or other species occupy the Trust land prior to the potential development of a wind farm on the Trust land or adjoining private land.

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

*Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

The nature of the proposed action is gathering environmental data and the mitigations would limit motorized travel to established roads. The grazing lease reviews did not note any archaeology and there have been no studies of the Section noted in the DNRC Trust Land Management System. No significant impacts historical or archaeological sites are anticipated.

**11. AESTHETICS:**

*Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

The proposed project area is located in a very sparsely populated area with very few residences. Due to location and nature of the proposed project, aesthetics are not expected to be adversely affected.

**12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:**

*Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

No significant impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air or energy are anticipated as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

**13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:**

*List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*

There are no other known State actions planned in the immediate area. The proposed action being reviewed in this document is only for gathering environmental data and this data could be used for a future environmental review on the subject section if a wind energy development is proposed. However, there is no proposal at this time.

**IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION**

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

**14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

No significant impacts to human health and safety are anticipated as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

*Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.*

No significant impacts to agricultural, industrial or commercial activities are anticipated as a result of issuing a Land Use License.

**16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

*Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.*

Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have a significant adverse impact on employment.

**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

*Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.*

The proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact on the local and state tax base and tax revenues.

**18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:**

*Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services.*

The implementation of the proposed alternative is not expected to generate an increased demand for government services.

**19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:**

*List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.*

Stillwater County does have an adopted Growth Policy that covers the entire County and the proposed alternative does not conflict with the Growth Policy. Also, the subject section has not been zoned by Stillwater County.

**20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:**

*Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

Section 36-1N-19E does not currently have legal public access. The ability for the general public to recreate on this tract is limited to those persons who were able to obtain permission from the adjoining private landowners to cross their land and access the State section.

Section 36-1N-20E does have legal public access via Lone Tree Road that generally traverses the section from the southwest to the northeast.

One of the mitigation measures would prohibit motorized vehicular travel during hunting season to avoid any problems with enforcement of the general ban on driving on Trust land. The implementation of the proposed action is not expected to have an adverse effect on the recreation or hunting activity on the section.

**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.*

The proposed alternative is not expected to have an adverse effect on density and distribution of population and housing.

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that should be impacted by the proposed alternative.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:***How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

The proposed alternative would not directly impact cultural uniqueness or diversity.

**24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:**

*Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

The Common Schools Trust will benefit by getting a rental fee from Lonetree Wind Farm, LLC of \$150.00/year. This Land Use License would allow the gathering of environmental data on the Trust land.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Jeff Bollman, AICP	<b>Date:</b> 1 June 2012
	<b>Title:</b> Area Planner, Southern Land Office	

## V. FINDING

**25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:**

The proposed alternative has been selected and it is recommended that a Land Use License (LUL) be issued to Lonetree Wind Farm, LLC. This LUL would permit the proponent to gather environmental information and possibly lead to future wind energy development on the subject Trust lands.

**26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:**

I conclude all identified potential impacts will be avoided by utilizing the mitigations listed below and no significant impacts will occur as a result of implementing the proposed alternative.

## Mitigations:

1. Motorized travel on established roads only.
2. Motorized use is only permitted on dry or frozen conditions, no motorized use is allowed during wet and/or muddy conditions.
3. No motorized use during the Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks approved archery and general hunting seasons for deer and antelope. In 2012, this would prohibit motorized use from 1 September to 25 November.
4. Licensee must contact grazing lessee at least 24 hours before entering the subject Trust land.

**27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**☐

EIS

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More Detailed EA

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No Further Analysis

<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Matthew Wolcott
	<b>Title:</b> Area Manager, Southern Land Office
<b>Signature:</b> /s/Matthew Wolcott	<b>Date:</b> June 1, 2012